

## Interview with Vital Morin

I was born on June 17, 1923 at Isle A La Crosse, Saskatchewan.

I was raised right here, except for my school days. I spent 7 years in Beauval Residential School. It was an Indian School but was owned and ran by the Roman Catholic Mission. When we were orphans in 1930, the Bishop decided to take us boys there because we had no mother. He put us in that school. I stayed at that school for 7 years without going home once. My vacations and summer was spent there. When we were tending school, naturally we were doing school work. During the summer I used to help with the farm work, raising cattle, haying. I spent most of my time as a chore boy.

I was 16 years old when I left school. Then I went to Buffalo and lived with an uncle for a couple of years. I started commercial fishing. That was part of the work that I learned. Most of the summers were spent doing odd jobs and chores for the place where I lived. Mostly, I was helping with the commercial fishing in the Buffalo area. I even worked for a mink rancher there for a year or so. I didn't even know that war had broken out, in the north we had no communication. In those days, we knew very little of what was going on down south.

I decided to come back to Beauval to live with my brother for a summer or so. In them days they had what you call relief work. They were trying to build a road from Meadow Lake to Isle A La Crosse. To be able to have trucks bring in supplies for us. It was all hand built. I worked there for \$.50 a day in the summer of 1941. A foreman from the Meadow Lake area came around and he wanted a couple of men to go work around the Sincere Lake area, between Meadow Lake and Green Lake. They were using a small caterpillar to make a grate and they wanted a couple of men to go around picking up stones and roots and whatever. Two of us decided to go. The one weekend was pay day, after 2 weeks work, I got \$6.00 pay. A bunch of other people from Meadow were there. They all decided to go to Meadow. So, I jumped in there, to go as well. It was my first time seeing Meadow Lake. I had never been south.

While in Meadow Lake that weekend, I saw a couple of boys from Green Lake. They were dressed in uniform. I asked them where they had gone to get a uniform, what did they have to do. They told me they had joined the army. I asked how they did that. They showed me a recruiting office across the street. The young fellow from Beauval and myself, not knowing any

better, decided to join the army. The sergeant behind the desk started pulling out papers and forms. He told us to go see the doctor 3 or 4 doors down. He gave us a form to give to the doctor. The doctor checked us over to see if we were fit to join the army. We did that.

The doctor gave us back our forms. I passed. My friend failed. So, I left home by myself. The sergeant told me they would provide me with a room in the hotel. At 8:00 in the morning they gave me a bus ticket and meal tickets. The bus was to take me to Saskatoon in the morning. That's what I did.

I ended up in Saskatoon. My God, it was the first time I had ever seen a city. It was a fair size already. All I had was the clothes I was wearing, nothing else. I got off at the bus depot. I didn't know where to go. I started asking people where the army barracks were. Finally I got directions. It took about an hour to walk there. Once I got there, it wasn't to bad. There was a bunch of young recruits there also. We were quite quick to meet each other. We stayed around there for a whole week taking medicals to make sure we were fit to be in the army. After we were through with that and passed the medical, we were shipped to Regina. That's where I got my uniform and I took my basic training in Regina. Basic training was 3 months.

They transferred us from Regina to Borden, Ontario, where I took advanced training, that's what they called it. I was with the Canadian Armoured Core then. I took most of my training in tanks, infantry carriers, trucks - all armoured vehicles of all types. Most of it was driving. This is where I learned to drive a vehicle. I was only 18 years old at that time. I was still 17 when I enlisted. By the time I got over there I was 18.

It took over a year for the advanced training. After that we were shipped overseas and I was stationed at Aldershot, England. All we did is just take training. That's where I got transferred into the infantry. They put me in with the Regina Rifle Regiment. I had to go and take training right in England, infantry training. Some of it was basic, but I still had to have some advance training.

## **D-DAY LANDING**

From there we went until D-Day came around in 1944. I didn't go across until late 1943. In 1944 when the war broke out and the Normandy landing on D-Day, I was part of it there. I was also in that landing. Fortunately, I wasn't the first one there. I was about a half day behind. I was in the afternoon. They were already on land then and had penetrated around there. We were fairly well protected as you were coming off the barges. We used barges to go to shore with.

## **CAPTURED BY THE ENEMY**

Apparently we didn't know that a bunch of para-troopers had landed in there. They never even fired an warning shot. We thought everything was fine. We got into a forest and we never even knew that we had been surrounded. That's how I got captured.

In a leading battalion of 33 men, only 7 of us taken. I still know what happened to the others. There were only 7 us taken, probably all that was alive, I suppose. I still remember my two partners, we were both laying there, I was in the centre, and never got hit. They did. It was in February sometime. Around the middle of February that I got captured. They just pushed us back. We walked about 2-3 miles back into their lines. That's where we crossed the Rhine River. They put us on a truck and took us over there and locked us up in this old building at night. The next day they transported us further and further until we ended up in prison camp. They told me it was about 90 miles out of Berlin. The name of the camp is Stalag 11B. That's the prison camp I was in.

I was there approximately 3 months. We were liberated before the war ended on May 6, 1945. After liberation they drove us to the airport, about 60 miles out of Germany. The bombers landed there. We went on a bomber and they flew us across to England. I ended up in hospital for 3 weeks. Then we went back to the army barracks at Aldershot. They gave us a month's leave and enough money to go around. I made a trip all

over the place. I went into Ireland and Scotland and saw the country a bit. I went to Glasglow, Edinburgh. I didn't see very much of Ireland. I didn't stay long. Mostly in Scotland. I concentrated in Glasglow and also Edinburgh. We stopped also in Manchester, England. The people treated us good. They thought we were really heroes, especially when they knew we were at the frontlines, or a prisoner of war.

It was going onto the end of June and I went back to the barracks. They called up the names of the wounded and the prisoners of war. We were ready to go back to Canada. We were the first boat to come back across. July 1, 1945, I landed in Halifax from England. Then they put us on a troop train, all the way to Regina. I didn't get discharged until October, 1945.

#### **VE DAY**

I was actually in the hospital. I didn't see too much. I was able to get a pass and go around and see the celebrations they had. There were people on the street by the 1000's. All hollering and holding beers and having a good time. I was still in hospital and wasn't able to join them.

#### **AFTER THE WAR**

I came back home after I was discharged. I settled here, went back to being a commercial fisherman. I was pretty well on my own. I bought a fishing outfit. I also worked with the RCMP in 1946 for 6 months. I worked for as a fish buyer for the Hudson Bay Co. in the winter. On July 1, 1946, I decided to get married. That's when I met my wife here, in 1945. I decided to get hooked up in 1946. All our kids are all grown up now. We had 11 kids, 7 boys and 4 girls. They're all still healthy and all living and all fully grown. Pretty well all on their own now.

#### **LOOKING BACK**

The reason I went into the army I think was that I didn't know any better. I was kind of green. It was the first time I

had ever seen Meadow Lake. When I saw the young boys in uniform, I was tempted to try that. I didn't know any better. The experience was very useful because I was looked at as a community leader. I was able to help the community to grow. I was able to help with a lot of things. I was elected for 16 years to the town council and 10 years to the school board. I decided to give it up and let other people do it. We established our own school board and took over running our own school.